Achievement First Connecticut

(Amistad Academy, Elm City College Prep, AF Bridgeport, AF Hartford)

Safe Return to In-Person Instruction

and Continuity of Services Plan

As of December 2022

Introduction

Our Connecticut school communities — with students at the center — continue to be bold and innovative as they respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. The United States Department of Education (USED) has recognized the importance of supporting these efforts, particularly with the infusion of resources to support education in Connecticut. The American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ARP ESSER) has granted the State of Connecticut additional funding, providing the opportunity to develop bold, high-impact plans to address the substantial disruptions to student learning, interpersonal interactions, and social-emotional well-being. While earlier sources of federal relief funding during the pandemic supported our ability to first survive, and then thrive, ARP ESSER is Connecticut’s opportunity to transform our schools.

The federal government requires that each Local Education Agency (LEA) create a *Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan* (the Plan). This plan must be publicly available online by June 23, 2021 and submitted to the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) as a part of the ARP ESSER application due mid-August 2021. To aid in the planning process, CSDE is providing this template to guide LEAs planning as well as serve as an opportunity to share the Plan with the public.

Due to the expansive efforts of the CSDE and the educational community, as of the week of May 3–7, no district in the state of Connecticut was fully remote. This was achieved through extensive planning by each LEA; therefore, this template should be seen as a means to support LEAs’ efforts to date and can be used to expand upon or revisit previous Reopening School Plans.

There are five areas that LEAs must consider when developing the *Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan:*

I. Health and Safety Strategies

II. Continuity of Services

III. Public Comment

IV. Periodic Review Process

V. Understandable and Uniform Format

The CSDE has maintained consistently that in-person learning is the preferred opportunity for students and that schools should work to safely open their buildings for the 2020–21 school year. We are proud to have led the nation in safe return to in-person instruction — as of April 30 nearly 82.7% of Connecticut school districts were offering a predominately fully in-person learning. Thank you for your work and helping us continue to be an example of how we can best serve our children safely in school buildings.

I. Health and Safety Strategies

Describe how the LEA plan includes (or will be modified to include) the extent to which the LEA has adopted policies and a description of any such policies on each of the strategies listed in the table on page 2:

| Nothing is more paramount than the safety of our students and staff. We recognize that students, families and staff continue to face concerns and uncertainty regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, even as many aspects of their lives return to pre-pandemic activities. We did our best to honor that in these draft plans while also taking into account updated health and safety guidance.  As we look to the coming school year, we will follow our districts on key decisions that will impact the ability of our students to attend school in-person. These decisions include what social distance we will be asked to comply with, whether a remote option is available, and what the quarantine rules will be for a positive case within a school. We will continue to seek clarity from our districts and CSDE in the coming weeks and months on these topics.  We adjust our health and safety measures in accordance with updated CDC guidance. |
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Please complete the table below with the LEA’s mitigation strategy for each category. In developing the LEA’s response, please review and consider the CDC guidance and the Connecticut DPH and CSDE guidance for each category.

|  | Mitigation strategy | LEA response |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Physical distancing (e.g., including use of cohorts/podding) | Our distancing plan includes:   * Removing any excess furniture (outside of student/teacher desks). * Maximize space between student desks to the greatest extent possible (at least 3 feet).   Cohorts:   * In accordance with CDC guidelines, while rates are in the “moderate” or “low” transmission category, we do not plan to keep stable pods and will have students mix learning groups for essential instructional blocks. * If community transmission rates escalate to the “high” or “substantial” categories, we will reassess and establish more stringent podding policies. |
|  | Handwashing and respiratory etiquette | * At a minimum, staff and students must wash their hands with soap and water (or use an alcohol-based sanitizer that contains at least 70% of alcohol) when entering the building, before and after meals, before and after recess, and before and after lessons that include shared materials. * Students/staff will be encouraged to wash hands or use sanitizer throughout the day. |
|  | Cleaning and maintaining healthy facilities, including improving ventilation | **Cleaning:**  *High-touch items*   * Staff members must clean/disinfect any high touch items in their classroom/office throughout the day, ideally between uses. This includes door knobs, light switches, and any classroom items that must be shared between students. * Staff members will be trained on how to clean these items effectively.   *Daily classroom/building cleaning*   * In both our private buildings and our co-located buildings, janitorial staff will be expected to meet the CDC standards of daily cleaning and disinfecting.   **Ventilation**:  The AF ventilation policy varies by building type. The complete details can be found [here](https://docs.google.com/document/d/10PTQkBy6ds5PErh2szoWND-r4I79auoO3pigHw7jVX4/edit?usp=sharing). |

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|  | Mitigation strategy | LEA response |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | Contact tracing in combination with isolation and quarantine, in collaboration with the State, local, territorial, or Tribal health departments | Achievement First schools and network support are closely monitoring COVID-19 data throughout the state and intend to adhere to the directives of government agencies that provide such related to the closing or limitations on school attendance.  Furthermore, each school’s health and safety liaison (Director of School Operations) will track any absences known to be COVID-19 related and perform necessary contact tracing to determine if a classroom or school closure is necessary.  Shifts in classroom or school open status will be recorded and shared with appropriate CSDE and DOH staff. |
|  | Diagnostic screening and testing | Asymptomatic testing:   * The current guidelines of the CDC and our local districts no longer require nor strongly suggest the need for frequent asymptomatic testing programs. All AF schools have discontinued asymptomatic testing as of November 4, 2022. * With this change, AF provides four at-home rapid tests a month (until June 2023) to each staff member and student to use in the case of exposure or potential COVID-19 symptoms. Additionally, at-home rapid tests will be provided prior to all major school breaks. Moving to at-home test kits provides more flexibility, and the ability for all members to be tested as they so need. |
|  | Efforts to provide vaccinations to educators, other staff, and students, if eligible | Achievement First has mandated that all staff must be vaccinated. Staff that are granted a medical or religious exemption must submit weekly testing. We will continue to encourage stakeholders to get vaccinated. |
|  | Appropriate accommodations for children with disabilities with respect to the health and safety policies | Achievement First is committed to serving all students consistent with requirements under IDEA and the provision for FAPE in the LRE.  Achievement First schools will strive to meet the overall expectation of in-person learning (although that is certainly subject to change), and are preparing to provide most of the services in an in-person environment for students with IEPs.  The related service providers we have on staff will design what the schedule looks like for those related service minutes – in conjunction with school leaders guidance. Related service providers that we contract from the district will be expected to share how they expect this to work safely for students.  We have already worked with our Special Services Leaders at our schools to identify students who may need different mask/ face coverings for them or their teachers to access learning or services and are planning out how to ensure those services happen along with appropriate safety measures like social distancing. |

*LEA must implement, to the greatest extent practicable, each element of the most up-to-date guidance listed in the table.*e Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan Template — CSDE ARP ESSER

II. Continuity of Services

Describe how the LEA plan will ensure continuity of services including but not limited to services to address the students’ academic needs, and students’ and staff social, emotional, mental health, and other needs, which may include student health and food services:

| Even during a global pandemic, Achievement First’s mission has been unwavering: to deliver on the promise of equal educational opportunity for all of America’s children. We know that every child -- regardless of race, zip code or economic status -- deserves access to great schools. At Achievement First, our scholars realize their potential and develop the skills they need to graduate from college, succeed in a competitive world, and serve as the next generation of leaders in our community.  In these challenging times -- with increasing learning gaps and turmoil caused by racial violence -- our mission is more important than ever. Regardless of what school looks like, we must ensure that every scholar who attends an AF school is known, loved and well educated. We must create school environments that are joyful, engaging and rigorous while also preserving the safety of children and adults.  Our scholars’ socio-emotional health is at the forefront of our plans. We’ve seen an increase in anxiety and stress caused by the pandemic, the inability to interact with friends and the recent upheavals caused by racial violence. Here are a few elements of our plan to provide socio-emotional support:  **Onsite Support**  At every Achievement First school, we will have a school social worker or specialist, who will be trained in recognizing signs of distress and helping students develop healthy coping strategies. Some of our schools have partnered with an expert outside organization (Ramapo for Children) to receive training on how best to support scholars dealing with trauma. |
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II. Public Comment

Public comment is a key element of stakeholder engagement, and at times a stand-alone element which may include dedicating time to open forums at board of education meetings, conducting surveys, or soliciting written input from external residents not involved in the decision-making process. Describe how the LEA plans to provide the public the opportunity to provide input and for public comment in the development of the plan, a summary of the input (including any letters of support), and how the LEA took such input into account:

| Our recent work with the National Equity Project has strengthened our belief that *how* we design matters as much as *what* we design. Network and school leaders have begun to intentionally engage a diverse set of stakeholders -- including scholars, families, teachers, deans, principals and different network support teams in the planning process and will continue to engage with stakeholders as we get updates from our districts and the CDC.  Each of our school’s post and encourage public participation at their meetings, and reserve a time in each meeting for public comment.  This commitment, combined with our core values to Care for the Whole Person and Go Further Together, has driven AF schools to authentically engage with our families on all matters that affect them. We have implemented a new communication tool, ParentSquare that enables more engaging messaging, and two-way communication. Our schools routinely survey students and families and provide opportunities for them to share thoughts and suggestions.  Most importantly, each of our families will receive personalized outreach from school personnel during late July and August to hear any concerns about the safe return to school and to learn more about the steps schools are taking to prioritize student and staff safety. |
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IV. Periodic Review Process

LEAs are required to periodically review and, as appropriate, revise their *Safe Return to In-Person Instruction and Continuity of Services Plan* at least every six months through September 30, 2023. Each review must include seeking public comment on the plan and developing the plan after taking into account the public comment.

Below are the dates that LEAs must submit a refreshed or updated plan to CSDE via eGMS.

Review/revisit Dates:

• June 23, 2021

• December 23, 2021

• June 23, 2022

• December 23, 2022

• June 23, 2023

V. Understandable and Uniform Format

Federal regulations require that this plan be in an understandable and uniform format, to the extent practicable; is written in a language that parents can understand or, if not practicable, orally translated; and upon request by a parent who is an individual with a disability, provided in an alternative format accessible to that parent. Describe the unique needs of the LEA’s audience and confirm the LEA’s approach to ensuring the document is accessible:

Our schools strive to reflect the communities we serve. This means that a meaningful percentage of our school and/or family population speaks a language other than English, the most common being Spanish. We translate all family facing materials to Spanish and provide real-time translation or dedicated Spanish sessions. This document will be translated and posted separately from the English language version.